

Introductory Note

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This special section of the journal is aiming to re-examine some of the current trends in entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship literature as well explore some recent challenges, which have strongly influenced the socioeconomic context of the field globally and, thus, set a new agenda for academic research.

The beginning of the 2020s was marked with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, which soon led to a series of dramatic measures by national governments such as imposing several constraints and limitations for many entrepreneurs and firms, but also facilitating the exploration of new niches and opportunities. How dramatic was the general impact of the pandemic on the entrepreneurship? In the paper by Ondřej Dvouletý, which opens this section, using available statistics it is shown that in Central Europe, more concretely in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia, entrepreneurship after COVID-19 is recovering rapidly and there are no signs of any significant decline. Most of the related indicators even increased compared to the pre-pandemic period, according to Eurostat data. Moreover, in some sectors COVID-19 played the role of an ‘enabler’, therefore, the highest increase of entrepreneurial activity was reported in the information and communication sectors of these economies, which might be associated with the need to shift economic and social life online. This article shows that external shocks should be viewed not only as ‘black swans’, but also as a source of new business opportunities and entrepreneurship activities.

In particular, the pandemic has increased the implementation of digital processes and technologies by entrepreneurial firms. This is the central point of the next paper by László Szerb, Enikő Czigler and Gergely Zoltán Horváth. The paper is based on the results of the Digital Entrepreneurship Ecosystem (DEE) Index methodology created by Szerb et al. (2021) and compares the former socialist Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries’ progress in the development of their digital

entrepreneurship ecosystem. Here, the authors have elucidated the possible role played by transitional economies’ socialist heritage in the digitalization of entrepreneurial activity. The analysis of the data showed that among 170 countries, European nations generally perform quite well. CEE countries do not belong to the top tiers in Europe, but they did form a group trailing close behind the leaders, especially the group of Southern European countries in their DEE development. Moreover, former Soviet countries and non-EU Balkan countries are very similar to one another. This paper also contains the DEE profile of Russia, where the four-sub-indices, twelve pillars, and 24 variables illustrate Russia’s modest performance in the development of its own digital entrepreneurship ecosystem. Generally, after examining the DEE of the former socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe, the authors came to the conclusion that, despite significant variations in the DEE scores, these differences can be explained by recent economic developments, but not by the long-lasting effects of the formerly socialist economy. This is important evidence, indicating that more than 30 years after the beginning of systemic changes in these countries, it is the features of the transition and the institutional traps of respective development trajectories that should be taken into consideration when assessing entrepreneurship ecosystems and performance in this region.

The digitalization of entrepreneurship, establishment of new innovation-driven ventures is inevitably connected with the role of universities and academic innovative entrepreneurship, which is the theme of the paper by Olga Belousova, Aard J. Groen, and Anastasia Sutormina. This paper is focused on the key driver of an entrepreneurial university, academic entrepreneurship, and explains that developing academic entrepreneurship within a university requires a long-lasting process of change. The authors discuss the three main characteristics of entrepreneurship at universities – its content, process, and context - along such dimen-

sions of decision-making and performance, such as anticipation, reflexivity, inclusion, and responsiveness. Based on the findings from international literature and some practical cases, the authors point out the embeddedness of academic entrepreneurship in different contextual settings of institutions and actors and thus explore future research prospects of the phenomenon. They argue that the entrepreneurial journey of each university is unique, because it is embedded in very different internal and external contexts, therefore, a single way to establish and nurture academic entrepreneurship is impossible to define. Consequently, a reflective strategy is needed allowing each university to elaborate upon and implement its own entrepreneurial strategy.

The last paper of the section by Ekaterina Kozachenko, Alexander Chepurenko, and Galina Shirokova is dedicated to the systematic analysis of entrepreneurship research in Russia over the last thirty years. In order to understand the achievements and gaps, as well as methodological problems to be solved in future by Russian researchers,

this article provides an overview of relevant papers on Russian entrepreneurship in leading domestic academic journals during the period of 1991-2023. The analysis allowed for the identification of the best reflected topics, advances in the theoretical elaboration of entrepreneurship in Russia, as well as some weak points and contradictions in research programs and empirical methods, compared with the state of art in international journals. As a result of the analysis, the need for a 'double mixed approach' is put forward, that is, in such a contextual exploration of entrepreneurship in Russia, the macro-, meso- and micro-contexts must be considered as must the temporal dynamic of these contexts over the course of systemic changes. Consequently, the authors propose following tasks for entrepreneurship research in Russia: (1) the reconceptualization of standard definitions and concepts of the theory of entrepreneurship, considering the Russian context; (2) building new theories and concepts of the middle level based on the investigation of unique phenomena and institutions in the Russian business environment.